

STAT

Page Denied

S-E-C-R-E-T

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

29 February 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Communist Alternatives in Vietnam

1. Current Intentions. The Communists probably intend to maintain widespread military pressures in Vietnam for at least the next several months. A special effort will be made to harass urban areas and keep them under threat. They will probably calculate that the US/GVN will be forced to defend the towns and the countryside will be left more vulnerable to Communist domination. At some time, new Communist attacks will probably be launched to seize and hold certain cities and towns. Where conditions appear favorable they will engage US forces, seeking some significant local success which would have a major political return. The total result of their campaign, they hope, will be to so strain the resources of the US and the GVN/ARVN, that the Saigon government will lose control of much of the country and the US will have little choice but to settle the war on Communist terms.

GROUP 1

Excluded from automatic
downgrading and
declassification

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

2. In support of this effort, the Communists are now introducing more new weapons with greater fire power, improving the capacity and security of their supply routes, maintaining a high rate of infiltration, and probably introducing additional NVA units. They are also raising new levies as rapidly as they can in the countryside of South Vietnam in order to sustain the momentum of the recent offensive.

3. Military Alternatives. The broad alternative to the course described above is for the Communists to increase the level of military pressures. For example:

a. The Communists could intensify their offensive by committing almost all of their reserves from North Vietnam. This would be tantamount to an all-out invasion to gain decisive results as quickly as possible. They might be tempted by the prospects of seizing most of I Corps, where a "revolutionary" government would be proclaimed. The prospect of heavy US reinforcements might persuade them to gamble in this way before such US reinforcement could be committed.

b. Short of this radical move, the Communists might believe that the commitment of two or three additional divisions would be

- 2 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

decisive. They could use such forces in a general offensive in I Corps, which might be coordinated with a countrywide attack similar to 30-31 January. They might do something like this if they believed the situation was so precarious for the GVN that one last push would prove decisive.

The first of these alternatives would probably seem to them far too risky. While the Communists hope for a decisive outcome in their current efforts, we believe they will be careful to maintain reserves in North Vietnam to guard against an invasion and to enable them to continue the war if their offensive should prove indecisive. They could, of course, call on the Chinese to maintain the defense of NVN, but would almost certainly be reluctant to do this. The second alternative is more likely; it may indeed be a part of their plan in the current offensive.

c. Rather than maintaining steady pressures or radically escalating, the Communists might seek out one major battle which promised significant political gains, such as Khe Sanh, the western highlands, or in Saigon. They might believe that an isolated victory would have such profound political repercussions that the war would soon be terminated. The analogy with Dien

- 3 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

Bien Phu would be uppermost in their minds. Such a move could, of course, be what they intend as the climax to their current campaign.

d. Finally, the Communists could hope to affect the outcome in Vietnam by putting pressures on the US in Laos, where they might expand their current efforts and threaten to overrun most of the country. The purpose of this move would be to persuade the US that the only alternative to ending the war in SVN was its continued expansion.

4. Political Options. Until the military campaign has run its course and the results are fairly clear, it is unlikely that Hanoi will be seriously disposed to consider negotiations with the US. A negotiating ploy is possible, however, at almost any point in the present military campaign. It would be intentionally designed to be difficult for the US to reject. The purpose, however, would not be a serious intent to settle the war, but rather to cause new anxieties in Saigon, which might cause a crisis and lead to the collapse of the Thieu-Ky government.

5. As of now Hanoi probably foresees two alternative sets of circumstances in which a serious move to negotiate a settlement might be entertained:

- 4 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

a. Obviously, if the military campaign is producing significant successes and the GVN is in serious disarray at some point Hanoi would probably give the US the opportunity to end the war. This might take the form of offering a general cease-fire followed by negotiations on terms which would amount to registering a complete Communist political success.

b. If, on the other hand, the military campaign does not go well and the results are inconclusive, then Hanoi would probably change its military strategy to continue the struggle on a reduced level.

- 5 -

S-E-C-R-E-T